

Opening of trails along C&D Canal celebrated by Delaware, Maryland officials

Mark completion of the continuous trail that includes Michael N. Castle and Branch Canal Trails in Delaware, and the Ben Cardin Trail in Maryland

DELAWARE CITY – The grand opening of recreational trails along the Chesapeake and Delaware (C&D) Canal was celebrated today by Delaware and Maryland officials who included Governor Jack Markell, U.S. Senators Tom Carper and Chris Coons, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Lt. Col. Michael Bliss, USDA Rural Development State Director Bill McGowan, DNREC Secretary David Small, DelDOT Secretary Jennifer Cohan, Delaware State Senator Nicole Poore, Delaware City Mayor Stanley Green and Chesapeake City Mayor Dean Geracimos. They were joined by other officials, scores of trails partners and enthusiasts, and special guest, former Delaware Governor and Congressman Michael N. Castle.



Guest of honor and trail namesake Michael N. Castle (second from right), former Delaware governor and congressman, joined with Gov. Markell and US Senators Chris Coons and Tom Carper, along with DelDOT Secretary Jennifer Cohan and DNREC Secretary David Small, to celebrate the grand opening of recreational trails along the C&D Canal. /DNREC photo

The event marked the completion of the 14.3-mile continuous trail that includes the Michael N. Castle and Branch Canal Trails in Delaware and the Ben Cardin Trail in Maryland. The Castle and Cardin Trails run along the north bank of the C&D Canal and meet at the state line, while the Branch Canal Trail connects the Castle Trail to Delaware City's Canalfront Promenade. The entire trail connects travelers to the historic towns of Delaware City, Del. and Chesapeake City, Md.

The trails in Delaware are part of the Gov. Markell's First State Trails and Pathways Initiative that expands a statewide

network of new and enhanced trails and pathways for walking, biking, hiking and active living. Delaware's trails promote the growth of the recreation and tourism industries, enable people to connect with the outdoors and improve the quality of life for all Delawareans.

"The opening of the recreational trails along the C&D Canal marks another great milestone in expanding Delaware's trail network of more than 571 miles of trails," said Gov. Markell. "Building the trails linking two historic cities was a tremendous collaboration among state, federal and city partners. With the trails now completed, more residents and visitors will be drawn to the wonderful amenities that Delaware City and Chesapeake City have to offer, expanding tourism and boosting the local economies. As a cyclist, the Michael Castle Trail with its natural, scenic beauty along the C&D Canal is one of my favorite trails to ride."

"This project has had 360 degrees of support – receiving funding on the federal, state and local level," said U.S. Sen. Tom Carper. "The trail provides a great opportunity for anyone to walk, run, bike, bird-watch, fish, and ride horseback in a scenic area. As our nation's health care costs rise, projects like these that support healthy lifestyle choices are increasingly important."

"This is an exciting time for cyclists, walkers, joggers, and anyone who enjoys the outdoors," said Sen. Coons. "Completing the trail on the north side of the C&D Canal has been a terrific group effort of federal, state and local agencies. I am delighted that the completed Castle and Cardin Trails will attract more visitors and encourage more families to get outdoors and enjoy this resource that connects two great small towns, Delaware City and Chesapeake City."

"I am proud of the legacy we are leaving to the residents of Maryland, Delaware and the region. We want people to enjoy their communities and feel connected to the outdoors and to

others,” said Maryland U.S. Senator Ben Cardin. This project will allow people to gain a greater appreciation of the history and future of this region, while also staying healthy. It is also an important economic driver, helping the small businesses in towns along the trail attract tourism dollars and thrive.”

“Undoubtedly, according to the many dozens of people who have spoken to me, this trail has proven to be a great addition to enjoying the outdoors along the C & D Canal. The bipartisan cooperation of elected and appointed officials at all levels of government over the years has made this possible. I remember vividly our visit to the Cape Cod Canal Trail in 2004 which incentivized us to move ahead with our project. There are many people who should be individually singled out and thanked, but I genuinely believe we would not have completed this project without the enthusiastic and persistent effort of Jeff Dayton, who served on my staff and later with Senator Carper and was so helpful in bringing all of us together to make this project a reality.”

The property along the north and south banks of the C&D Canal is owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and leased under a long-term agreement to the States of Delaware and Maryland. In Delaware most of the 5,178 acres is managed by DNREC’s Division of Fish & Wildlife as the C&D Canal Conservation Area. A small portion, including Fort DuPont, is administered by DNREC’s Division of Parks & Recreation, which also operates nearby Fort Delaware and Lums Pond State Parks. In Maryland the property is managed by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources.

“As the federal agency entrusted with stewardship of the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal, we are glad for the recreational opportunities this trail provides for the canal’s ultimate owners – the American people”, said Lt. Col. Michael Bliss, Philadelphia District Commander for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which owns and operates the canal as a shipping

channel.

Abundant wildlife and scenic views along the C&D Canal made the area a perfect location for a multi-use trail that provides recreational opportunities for pedestrians, bicyclists, anglers, equestrians, bird-watchers and nature enthusiasts. Trail users can view wildlife, such as deer, turkeys and raccoons, along with rarer species, that include peregrine falcons, pied-billed grebes, and bald eagles as they travel along the banks of canal and past the area's grasslands, forests, tidal marshes and ponds.

Michael N. Castle Trail: 12.1-mile trail in Delaware



An overhead view of the Michael N. Castle Trail on the C&D Canal facing the Summit Bridge toward Delaware City. /DNREC photo

The Michael N. Castle Trail was named in Oct. 2013 for the politician who served Delaware for nearly 40 years as state legislator, lieutenant governor, governor and U.S. congressman. While serving in Congress, Castle helped initiate a trail project along the canal in 2004, when constituents came to him with better ways to use the area around the canal.

The project was approved in 2005, however construction did not begin until mid-2012.

“Thanks to Congressman Castle and Governor Markell’s ‘First State Trails and Pathways Initiative,’ the Michael N. Castle Trail provides the opportunity for Delawareans to walk or cycle along the picturesque path linking the Chesapeake Bay and Delaware River,” said DelDOT Secretary Jennifer Cohan. “This trail and the more than 500 miles of public trails and multi-use pathways within Delaware, including the Northern Delaware Greenway Trail and the Jack A. Markell Trail, currently under construction, provide safe and enjoyable experiences for cyclists and hikers alike.”

“The Michael N. Castle Trail is one of Delaware’s ultimate destinations for outstanding recreational opportunities for hikers, runners, cyclists and equestrian enthusiasts,” said DNREC Secretary David Small. “Within 20 miles of the C&D Canal, there are more than 700,000 Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey residents who have the opportunity to discover one of the most unique and scenic trails in the country. This trail, like the other trails throughout Delaware, contributes to our appreciation and stewardship of nature and the environment and will certainly continue to be enjoyed by generations to come.”

The Trail includes 12.1 miles of paved surface, three trailheads located at Biddle’s Point, St. Georges and South Lums Pond, and site amenities, including benches and kiosk comfort stations. Attractive landscaping was added and trail counters installed that measure trail usage. More than 100,000 people annually have used this trail since it was partially opened in 2013.

“It’s rare that a singular project can mean so much for a community,” said Senate Majority Whip Nicole Poore, D-Barbs Farm. “From helping people stay healthy, to improving the economy of Delaware City, to giving people a close up view of

one of our state's defining characteristics, this trail is a fantastic resource for the 12th District and for all of Delaware."

DelDOT managed the construction of the trail. Project design and constructed costs totaling \$10.2 million were funded with 80 percent federal funds through the Federal Highway Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program and with 20 percent state bond bill appropriations to DelDOT and DNREC. The trail was designed by Johnson, Mirmiran & Thompson (JMT), and constructed by Daisy Construction Company of Newport, Del. and Grassbusters Landscaping Co. of Newark, Del. With construction now completed, DNREC's Division of Fish & Wildlife will manage and patrol the trail.

Ben Cardin Recreational Trail in Maryland: 1.8-mile trail to Chesapeake City

The 1.8-mile Ben Cardin Recreational Trail along the C&D Canal was named for Senator Cardin who served the State of Maryland for nearly 50 years and assisted the town of Chesapeake City with many initiatives throughout the years. The paved, shared-use recreational trail provides visitors with spectacular views of the C&D Canal and wonderful opportunities for hiking, biking and fishing.

"The completion of the last section of the Canal Trail provides vital recreational opportunities for hikers, joggers, bicyclists, and birders and ultimately transforms the region into a destination for recreation enthusiasts," said Chesapeake City Mayor Dean Geracimos. "However, it's more than just a recreational trail, it's an economic development driver that has already created new businesses in Chesapeake City. We're extremely excited about the new ferry service that starts up in mid-April and will transport pedestrians and bicycles from the ferry dock along the trail to the south side

of town and vice versa.”

Trail amenities include landscaping beds, benches, dog waste stations, a fishing dock and a volunteer trail master, Buddy Shephard. Visitors can access the trail in Chesapeake City at the trailhead by the town dock, located at the base of Lock Street. Parking is located under the Chesapeake City Bridge.

Chesapeake City and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers managed the construction of the trail. The project, totaling \$2 million, was funded through the Federal Highway Administration’s Public Lands Highway Discretionary Program. Trail construction was completed by Ahtna Corporation.

For more information on the Ben Cardin Recreation Trail, visit the [Chesapeake City website](#).

Branch Canal Trail: 0.4-mile trail linking the Castle Trail to Delaware City

The Branch Canal Trail provides a key link to the Michael N. Castle Trail, connecting hikers and cyclists using the Castle Trail with local businesses and historic and natural treasures located in and around Delaware City. The Trail was built over the 1920’s-era C&D towpath located next to the open water of the Branch Canal. The Trail was elevated and a bridge installed over marshy areas, and a 9.6-acre tidal wetland was created adjacent to the trail. The trail provides access to a recently-restored, important piece of Delaware history – the African Union Church Cemetery, the burial place of five members of the U.S. Colored Troops who served bravely for the Union in the Civil War.

“It is with a great deal of excitement that we celebrate the opening of the trail from Delaware City, Delaware to Chesapeake City, Maryland. With much anticipation the public now has 14.3-mile trail with one of the most beautiful vistas in the region,” said Delaware City Mayor Stanley Green.

"Delaware City is proud to have played a small part in connecting to the other trails that will be used by walkers, runners and bicyclist for years to come. I extend our thanks to all of the many people who had the vision for this project, especially those who brought this project to its completion."

"There is no question that tourism is a driving force in economic growth," said Dr. Bill McGowan, USDA Rural Development State Director. "The USDA-funded trailhead connector provides accessibility for trail users to safely cross the marshy branch from the Mike Castle Trail into beautiful Delaware City, a town rapidly becoming a destination for its welcoming downtown and amazing location on the Delaware River."

The construction of the Branch Canal Trail was managed by New Castle Conservation District. Trail design was completed by AECOM of Newark, Del., with construction by Eastern States Construction of Wilmington, Del. Design and construction costs totaling \$2.4 million were funded by grants and contributions to Delaware City and New Castle Conservation District from DNREC's Community Environmental Project Fund, Outdoor Recreation, Parks and Trails Grant Program, state bond bill appropriations and settlement and penalty funds, resulting from environmental violations, and from funds provided by the Delaware-Maryland USDA Rural Development Agency in Dover. In June 2016 the trail was dedicated at an event hosted by Delaware City.

For more information on Delaware City, Delaware and the Branch Canal Trail, visit the [Delaware City website](#).

The First State Trails and Pathways Initiative is a partnership led by the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control and the Department of Transportation with regional and local organization and government partners. For more information, visit trails.delaware.gov.

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